



For Developers in Niagara Falls, the Honeymoon's Just Beginning

NIAGARA FALLS, NY

The EPA Brownfields Pilot awarded to Niagara Falls in May 1997 is using both traditional and innovative techniques to restore the city's blighted properties. In addition to cataloging and performing environmental assessments on area brownfields, the Pilot is facilitating agreements between developers and the city to minimize risks and eliminate barriers to progress. When the seven brownfields assessed by the Pilot are cleaned up and redeveloped, the city's tax base is expected to increase by tens of thousands of dollars. Private investment, which has already reached nearly \$700,000 due to redevelopment of the former Union Carbide property, is expected to create hundreds of new jobs for area residents.

The Niagara Falls Brownfields Pilot used a systematic approach to restoring underused and potentially contaminated properties in the Highland Avenue neighborhood, a predominantly low-income, minority community. The Pilot inventoried and characterized brownfields sites, conducted assessments, and involved the community in setting redevelopment priorities. The neighborhood steering committee of 20 neighborhood residents met monthly to help guide Pilot activities and create a brownfields reuse plan for the neighborhood.

continued ►►

JUST THE FACTS:

- The first brownfields assessments funded by the Pilot were performed on a 5.5-acre portion of the 88-acre former Union Carbide site.
- The developer began renovating the site prior to its purchase, as part of an agreement with the city that would allow the company to withdraw if unexpected contaminants were discovered.
- A neighborhood steering committee of 20 residents met monthly to help guide Pilot activities and create a brownfields reuse plan for the neighborhood.

The Niagara Falls Brownfields Pilot used a systematic approach to restoring underused and potentially contaminated properties in the Highland Avenue neighborhood, a predominantly low-income, minority community.

EPA's Brownfields Economic Redevelopment Initiative is designed to empower states, communities, and other stakeholders in economic redevelopment to work together in a timely manner to prevent, assess, safely clean up, and sustainably reuse brownfields. A brownfield is a site, or portion thereof, that has actual or perceived contamination and an active potential for redevelopment or reuse. EPA is funding: assessment demonstration pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to assess brownfields sites and to test cleanup and redevelopment models; job training pilot programs (each funded up to \$200,000 over two years), to provide training for residents of communities affected by brownfields to facilitate cleanup of brownfields sites and prepare trainees for future employment in the environmental field; and, cleanup revolving loan fund programs (each funded up to \$500,000 over five years) to capitalize loan funds to make loans for the environmental cleanup of brownfields. These pilot programs are intended to provide EPA, states, tribes, municipalities, and communities with useful information and strategies as they continue to seek new methods to promote a unified approach to site assessment, environmental cleanup, and redevelopment.

The first brownfields assessments funded by the Pilot were performed in August 1998 on a 5.5-acre part of the 88-acre former Union Carbide site. Phase I and Phase II assessments revealed minimal contamination under a parking lot (requiring only that the asphalt surface remain undisturbed) and asbestos in two dilapidated buildings with crumbling roofs, which required removal. Following renovations, Standard Ceramics, a high-tech manufacturer of silicon carbide used in products such as rings, seals, and switches, purchased the site for \$30,000 and relocated six employees to this new location. The company also hired 12 local residents and anticipates hiring more in the future.

Standard Ceramics had begun renovating the site in July 1998 prior to its purchase, as part of an agreement with the city that would allow the company to withdraw from the sale if unexpectedly high levels of contamination were discovered. The company invested \$659,000 to renovate two of the property's three buildings, including upgrading electrical systems, installing a new power substation, and conducting asbestos abatement. In addition, the New York Energy Research and Development Authority is providing Standard Ceramics with research funding and technical assistance to test the market viability of new products. If market viability proves successful, the company will expand onto another Niagara Falls brownfields site, creating up to 100 new jobs. Furthermore, as part of the property sales contract with the city, Standard Ceramics has agreed to give preference to expansion within Niagara Falls, to ensure that local residents are hired for its operations. In return, the property was sold to Standard Ceramics at approximately one-fifth its market value.

Four additional assessments on sites previously utilized as a scrap metal yard, an asphalt manufacturing facility, an unregulated dump site, and a battery manufacturing facility were completed by Spring 1999. One site did not require cleanup, and cleanup has begun on the other three properties. The city is already marketing those sites—totaling 17.5 acres—in an effort to stimulate redevelopment. Plans are also underway for the Pilot to fund additional assessments that will help further the city's economic revitalization of more than 100 acres that are potentially available for redevelopment. For more information on the Niagara Falls Brownfields Pilot, contact Sherrel Henry at (212) 637-4273.

CONTACTS:

City of Niagara Falls
(716) 286-4467

EPA Region 2
(212) 637-4273

Visit the EPA Brownfields Web site at:
<http://www.epa.gov/brownfields/>

